



# COPING WITH THE PAST

CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES  
ON CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION



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CHAPTER SIX

## RE-PRODUCING ACOUSTIC LANDSCAPES

STEVEN FELD

I think that many of you around the table have considerably more shared history, shared conversation, and shared background of thinking and talking about articulations of art and culture. So in the course of these conversations here I have spent a lot of my time listening and wondering exactly at what point and in what way I might intervene in this conversation and position myself. There are three ways that my projects of past and recent years position me in these conversations. For our purposes today I will choose just the third, but speak first about how it relates to the broad body of my work on the first two.

I am an anthropologist of sound. I started as an acoustician and performing musician, and later became a linguist and anthropologist. I worked for 25 years in the rain forest in central New Guinea on the question of ecological and aesthetic co-evolution. I joined all the perspectives that are part of my background into a study of songs as poetic maps that reveal, from a bird's point of view, the relationship between ecological and cosmological knowledge. For example I studied how a thousand songs map seven thousand forest place names and how those maps are biographies of social lives tied to places in the forest. Then I transposed the knowledge from songs into other ways of knowing, like using GPS to create other maps to imagine how poetry is a kind of land title history, something that could be locally useful when dealing with logging and mining companies who are trying to gain access to these forests. So my interventions into issues about place and knowledge are happening in a number of levels and these connect in a number of ways to themes that have occupied us, themes of restoration and conservation, dis- and translocation, preserving or saving places, and the relationship between holding on to process and holding on to species – the kind of things that Shirley Strum and David Western have just talked about.

I have referred to the work I've done on these themes by the hybrid and invented term *acoustemology*, that is, acoustics + epistemology, to

try to step outside the usual business of musicology and to think more specifically about sound as a way of knowing the world. What is sound in human history as a modality of knowledge? And this concern with oral traditions very much connects to our brief: how can an oral music tradition, in which the original is often elusive, changing or even non-existent, survive and be re-elaborated in the present without losing its character?<sup>2</sup>

But that was not the part of the roundtable brief that grabbed me the most. The brief connected that dimension of oral tradition to another question. Can musical experience be spread and reproduced separating the sound material from the source and its context? This made me think of additional ways to join these conversations, because in addition to the New Guinea acoustemology work, I've also been working for twenty years on the problem of schizophonia, the separation of sound from its source. Here I encounter not just the history of digital sampling but also the very contentious cases of copyright and adaptation, and claims on the one side to inspiration and homage, and on the other side to appropriation and pillage. The cases I investigate here are ones linking well-known pop music stars like Madonna, Paul Simon, Herbie Hancock, David Byrne and Brian Eno to indigenous artists both known and obscure in Africa, New Guinea, Asia and the Middle East. The copyright question has been mentioned but not really explored in depth here so far. And the work I do on this joins that question to the issue of differences between the material and the ephemeral, or what the culture-crats refer to as tangible vs. intangible heritage. So here we get into cultural property discourse, and the differences between notions of ownership and stewardship. So I thought about possible intervention through this field I call "schizophonic mimesis" and what it says about "regimes of value," a concept introduced by Arjun Appadurai in the introductory essay to his book *The Social Life of Things*.<sup>3</sup>

So one thing that I have been learning here is how those two entry points, work on acoustemology, and work on schizophonia, link my concerns with the work you all do. But in the end it is a third entry point that I have chosen for coming to the table. That choice is based on two other sentences that are in our introductory brief, the sentences that speak about new technologies available for reproducing historical items of all forms and nature leading to revision of the radical distinction between original and copy. Here we have the modernist tropology of loss associated with the notion of the aura, in the sense of Benjamin, aura as what is lost from an imagined original, once it is mechanically reproduced.<sup>4</sup>

This concern with new technologies, opened to us here by the overwhelming excitement of Adam's work, takes me to the sentence that

grabbed me the most in the brief: and that was the one that asked if and how it was technically possible to revive the past or, so to speak, to let the past resonate. And I was immediately struck deeply by the acoustic metaphor in that phrasing: to let the past resonate. In what way are we talking about a re-sounding of the past? How can we let the past resonate, how can we make history and historical self-consciousness into an audible past? So I am interested in where audibility fits in this conversation.

This is associated with the final theme I quote from this brief, which is the question: "how can we inherit the past well?" As a matter of fact I am actively engaged in doing that through some processes of artistic intervention. Those processes of artistic intervention relate precisely to a beautiful phrase that I have recently heard: "poetics is a production of future memory." And this is precisely what I am interested in, interested in making things, sonic things, that open the ear to possible ways to hear the past, to acoustically imagine how the past resonates in the present, and to imagine the production of a future memory. In short, over and through time, what will be audible? And how might history be imagined as an audition?

I embrace and struggle with these questions by doing something which is very simple, but in a certain way also very subversive. I participate in processes of research and deep listening, and from that deep listening I make recordings with a tremendous degree of mediation. But, when you listen, these recordings sound utterly transparent in relation to the space and time they encode. And then I circulate those recordings through a technology that encourages copying, the CD, hoping that, like a virus, the sounds will proliferate and amplify audibility. In other words I am sharing a history of listening and a passion for listening by using a technology that encourages copying. And that hopefully contributes to both encouraging deep listening and disrupting binaries of the kind we have been wrestling with: the original, the copy, the tradition, innovation, and so forth.

I am trying to do the intellectual work of analyzing and speaking to these problems in and through the materiality of sound. I want to create possibilities for hearing the past in new and dramatic ways, and to do this I respect no genre whatsoever. I use the techniques of film and video soundtrack; I use the techniques of radio documentary; I use techniques of sound art; I use the techniques of museum and gallery sound installation; I use the techniques of musical documentation. I work with every kind of artist, every kind of documentarian, I work with scientists, and I especially work with indigenous people, who have shown some of the most serious interest in these things.

The most interesting thing that ever happened when I made a CD about one whole day in the life of the rainforest from the point of view



of the complex interactions of humans, animals and ambient environmental sound, is that I received a phone call from some people in the Arctic Circle who said "we are designing a museum and we want it to look the way your CD sounds." And I said: "fantastic, I'm on the next plane."<sup>5</sup>

So I began to go through a series of wonderful accidents like this, voyages in Europe, in places where I neither know the histories or cultures or languages the way I did in New Guinea where I spent 25 years. I found myself attracted to going to a place for a few days or weeks and thinking about how a different kind of engagement with the world – different to professional ethnography – was not a loss but a new opening for awareness about ephemeral or fleeting experiences. So what I find myself doing is brief but intense listenings-in to histories, listening to how people listen, and making recordings whose *raison d'être* is simply a sensuous engagement with sound environments. I call this practice "acoustic wandering," and I have wandered in six countries in Europe now over five years, listening and trying to think about how I can participate in making the past audible, and also engaging the radical possibility that deep listening might transform the way people think about places and the experience of space and time.

In Europe I was fixated first on bells. The fixation on bells was surely because of listening so closely to how birds map space and time in the New Guinea rainforest. I began then with a simple question: do bells stand to ten or eleven centuries of European history as birds do to forty thousand years of the rainforest? In other words, are bells, like birds, a technology for the production of consciousness about space and time? And if so, what can we know about this production of consciousness, social, religious, communal, ecological, cultural, just by listening. First, I listened to animal bells. I spent time walking with shepherds and pastoralists in France, Italy, Greece, Finland to think about how they know the belled world of reindeer, cows, sheep, goats, horses, how their animals create sonified maps which have historically defined differences between common land and private land in the construction of pastoral and regional history. I found that animal bells sonify mappings of the pastoral world in the same way that movements of birds in different niche zones sonify the rainforest.

Then I listened to church bells. And following the great historian Alain Corbin's brilliant book on village bells, *Les Cloches de la terre*, I looked at the history of the contestation over who owns time, the Church or the State, and how this is manifest in the ringing of bells and the control of the hours. And I imagined creating an accompanying soundtrack to Corbin's powerful historical work on bells, on the Church and the State.<sup>6</sup>

But I have not only been interested in bells from the point of view of control, the Foucaultian exercise of looking at how bells, like clock and work whistles, regiment and regulate time and the human bodies who absorb time. I am equally interested in how bells contest, destroy, and play with time. I try to imagine in a lot of these recordings an imaginary round table where I am getting Bakhtin and Foucault to debate the controlling power of bells and the parodic and contesting power of bells and why they are associated with fools, not just with the power of the State. And this is why I like going to Carnivals; there you hear the anti-authoritarian life of bells as clearly as you hear their authoritarian life by going to church or town hall.

So this is what I have been doing, listening to animal bells, human bells, church bells, town bells and every way that they relate to environments, to human presences, to human soundmaking (voices, instruments, cars, work implements, etc.). And with these recordings I intervene by creating acoustic essays that make documentary sound art about bells as a technology for this production of consciousness about space and time. So I make recordings and proliferate them and these recordings are in a sense like time capsules.<sup>7</sup>

For example, in Venice, it was obvious that I must listen to the bells in San Marco, where the bell tower is the largest structure here, rebuilt in 1912. How would you map the city from the audibility of that bell and its relationship to all the other bells in Venice? What I did was make a number of recordings of the San Marco bell, from the piazza and from different places at different kinds of elevation, including rooftops and so forth. I then added them together so that you can hear how the bell is something like a radio station. From the striking point the sound diffuses to peripheries of audibility, and those peripheries are implicated in human experiences of space and time. Then I took recordings of tour groups in all of those places, and then I took recordings of tour groups in the piazza. Then, because everything else was going to be an example of time that was expanded, or time that was compressed, I wanted an experience of real time. So I went into a café and had a cup of tea in San Marco for ten minutes, in the period leading up to, and then through the ringing of the bell. And there I'm hearing people speaking the local dialect, and on the sound system I'm hearing Madonna singing her song "Like a Virgin" as the bell finishes ringing on a Sunday at 10 a.m. and people are walking to the church. So on the finished piece you have the chronological space and time of my cup of tea in the café, and you have the multiple spaces and times of the bell and its relationship to acoustic community.<sup>8</sup>

Making that ten minute construction is a way of thinking about the audibility of the past in the present. It is not high tech, and it is not en-

gineered for the large movie screen; you can play it in your car, or you can play it on your i-pod, or you can play it on a very good sound system, it is not going to matter, you will get something. I am not interested in doing these pieces in an imposing way, of being a composer with a big "C." I'm mostly an experimentalist here, interested in what it means to put something like that out into the world, and to then experience what kinds of conversations proliferate, what kind of consciousness about belled time and space might come from that.

This thing might involve hundreds of hours of work and a tremendous amount of technical mediation from me, but it sounds like it is transparent, even simple, because one of the tracks is truly ten minutes long and your ears keep coming back to that. It is utterly mundane: a man walks into a café, asks for a cup of tea, receives it and drinks in the midst of voices, coffee machines, and the sound of the ceramics, glass, metal. And the fact that this man asks for a cup of tea speaking minimal Italian with an American accent has a particular location, because just outside the café there is a tour group, and they are speaking in Japanese. So even the presence of foreign languages is significant in the way the verbal sounds are layered in the soundtrack, given the history of languages spoken today and in the past in that piazza. This is also critical to ways we think about place and movement.

So these are the kinds of things I try to do in this work. And for me they go directly to this very eloquent question: how can we inherit the past well, and how do we imagine poetics as a production of future memory? For me those questions become a challenge for artistic practice: how can I create something that comes from intellectual work but performs its argument more directly in a sensuous medium, making the question of inheriting the past into a way of hearing the audible past? That is what I am working on here. I don't want to say more now, I'd like to hear how you think these recordings do or don't fit into these broader conversations, diverge from or are in synergy with some of the other art forms and agendas on the table, and of course we can also listen together and play something from the body of work in order to make the conversation more concrete.

## DEBATE

### Richard Powers

From my personal experience of listening to your recordings, whatever else you are recovering or restoring or conserving with regard to the endangered customs, the content of the music, the culture of the perfor-

mers, or the cultural outlook, your recordings also recover from me the ability to live in the present. When I first put on the recording that you distributed, after five and a half hours of multi-tasking and hyperlink-bouncing, I thought: am I going to be able to sit still for ten minutes of Macedonian bells? In fact, in listening, there is a kind of detoxification and recovery of the ability to simply be in a real-time relationship with the present moment. That was very revealing to me, and persistent long after the recording stopped.

### Steven Feld

All the engineers that I work with, and all the studios that I work with, always have the same response to these things. They tell me: "no you can't do this, it is too intense, too relentless." And why did they say that? They say it because I violate two rules all the time, and one is that I always have a track which is my breath, and I always have a track which is close to my feet. The experience of me as an agent moving in the world is present, and I mix it down so far that it is not entirely recoverable, but it is there, and in some way you will be aware of my bodily presence.

For about six years I have worked with a microphone inventor, trying to perfect the technique of microphones that can be worn on the head and which very subtly encode the materiality of the body's presence as a listening presence, while not intervening too much in the process of what is recorded. The microphones are worn so that they sit just next to the ears and they mimic the algorithmic relationship of sound reaching the two ears, which is what gives us the experience of stereo. The recordings are all made with slight movements of my head, and the sound is recorded with a 75% sweep of the front and sides, and a 25% mixture of sound from above and behind the head. So depending on what surfaces I have behind me, I get different kinds of acoustic reflections and I can create spatial depth with small head movement as I record. I also use a four-channel variant of this system, the DSM microphone system ([www.sonicstudios.com](http://www.sonicstudios.com)). They are tuned in such a way that heartbeat and breath and motion are encoded. The importance of presence for me in the recording is about the direct physical experience of the listener and the intervention of the body. I think some of the feelings of presence or immediacy that you mentioned might come from the fact that those kinds of dimensions are encoded.

### Richard Powers

Do you also have a temporal dimension?

### Steven Feld

I always have one track that is in real time, that is, chronologically unbroken time. I think that it is a necessary way to make a statement about both respecting time and understanding its plasticity. There is a real time to a recording, and we experience it through time and we are drawn into time by deep listening. But at the same time what is special about this technology and where the artistic intervention comes in is that simultaneously we can expand and compress time in relation to an experience where time is not altered.

### Shirley Carol Strum

Are you trying to capture the evocative power of that sound for the place and the people that are there?

### Steven Feld

Yes. Each recording is different and I am guided by local conversations with and between people, as well as my own research. I want to engage with different ways of relating human presence to the natural environment of sound, things that might be music or linguistic sound or extra non-musical, non-linguistic things, animals, the natural world. But the focus is always on the interactions. The reason why I make multiple layers, which then create all these interactions, is that I am guided by the metaphor of acoustic ecology, of the experience of the world as an experience of an acoustic ecology.

### Shirley Carol Strum

You know that particular acoustic ecology because you were there and the people who live in that place know the acoustic ecology for the same reason, but how can anyone else replicate the experience? Does it matter?

### Steven Feld

I always have an idea and it evolves from local conversations.

### Pedro Memelsdorff

What I like is that you are inverting our operation – which was bringing the past back into the present – by imagining our present as a past to be preserved. In fact, when yesterday we spoke of “restoring

the sound of the past” we could have simply said “restoring sound” – for every heard sound in the past. And we could have added the dimension you are now bringing in: whatever we do in trying to restore the past – be it in sight or sound – will add layers of interpretation that will be poeticized in the future as our present, that is, as past.

### Steven Feld

What I am most interested in adding to this conversation, or inserting for your thought and further dialogue, is these two terms, ephemerality and materiality. In sound we have the acoustic materiality, I mean there is always a physical dimension to the sound and its perception. And then there is the vanishing point, the instance or the immediacy of the vanishing. Then we have the third part of this equation, which is replication, or those forms of mechanical reproduction which allow us to repeat these things, and thus be able to hear them over and over and over. So I want to ask: what does that do, what does the experience of indulging in reproduction that way, and listening in that repeated way, what does it do to our understanding of this dynamic relationship between the ephemerality and the materiality of sound?

### Pedro Memelsdorff

Just as a footnote: if we speak of acoustic ecology and conceive the action of capturing it as a means of preservation, then the listening circumstances of recordings become crucial. I mean, what is left of the acoustic ecology of the San Marco bells and voices, if you hear them in a car? You say: “it is not going to matter, you will get *something*...”

### David Western

First of all a comment and then a question. I suppose because I am dyslexic, I am not very good at reading but I am good at listening. So your presentation was more evocative for me than any other. Now Bruno is far more visually inclined than me, and therefore does better with the written word. Two things really captured my imagination in your presentation. First of all, in 1965, I joined an expedition from the University of Leicester in Britain to Jordan. We traveled for two months, all through Europe and down through the Near East. Two things were significant on that trip. First, I was aware of how the bells changed sound as we traveled across Europe and into Asia, where the call to prayer of Islam then replaced church bells. Those sounds are still incredibly evocative for me. Second, I heard the sound of cattle bells along the way and that reminded me of the pastoral people I grew up among in Tanzania.



Subliminally, they recreated my childhood environment. I could smell fresh dung, hear cattle snuffling the grass and tearing off leaves. The sound of cattle bells in Asia transported me to another dimension in Africa.

How do we enrich sounds in that way, through our imagination? Perhaps some sounds are more deeply evocative than others. Perhaps using many senses simultaneously is more evocative than using any one singly. This brings me to your ecology of sound. Have you come across the word biophonics? It is another connection I think we should explore. In ecology, ecosystems sounds can tell you about the richness of species, about biodiversity. So biophonia can monitor the richness of a landscape as it recovers. I was in New Zealand last year, where they are preserving the last piece of lowland rainforest on the North Island. They do so by laboriously monitoring species by species. I suggested they use biophonics to record recovery and biotic richness. Having a good friend who supported the philharmonic orchestra in Auckland, I suggested the orchestra simulate the biological succession and growing richness of sound in one of their own productions. The juxtaposition of music and ecology is exciting. Since you've already done the ecology of sound of the rainforest in New Guinea, how much of the ecological richness could ecologists recognize in your work? That could be an exciting and useful connection.

### Steven Feld

This issue of new forms of intimacy or proximity between species is absolutely fascinating. Let me just answer that one specifically. I have increasingly worked with ecologists and ornithologists and people who are interested in adding acoustic information to species diversity mapping, and various kinds of work that is done to try to understand dynamic systems. The work in New Guinea was first and largely influenced by ornithologists, because birds turned out to be so important in the rainforest.

I was interested in this very complicated question: why are the best composers also the best ornithologists in the rainforest? This turned out to be something that connected ecological knowledge, cosmological knowledge and artistic ability.

Your question takes me to something else here too. There's a technique we use for recording birds. Ornithologists don't like to speak about it, because it seems a bit deceptive, but this is one of the first things I learnt from ornithologists and one of the things I loved the most. When you try to record a bird there is of course the problem of the distance, and when you use parabolic microphones, microphones that have

a parabolic dish and record at great distance, there can be a lot of distortion of the acoustic information. So you have this problem: how do you create proximity with birds? There is a very simple way you do it. You make the recording and you buy the cheapest, most horrible speaker you can buy. And you attach it to your tape recorder. You make the recording and you rewind it as quickly as possible, and then you play it back through this dollar Radio Shack-type speaker which at a high volume adds distortion. This is like holding a mirror up to the bird. After two or three weeks I was able to record just about any bird in the rainforest at the same distance that Richard is sitting from me. This playback of the recording with a little distortion creates disorientation and wonder for the bird, which then turns into the kind of curiosity that becomes a new physical intimacy. How marvelous a way to think about the power of receiving one's own voice through playback! And in the context of these conversations, of course I think, oh, here we are, back to facsimile, and we are in the center of it now: the reverse metaphor of the acoustic "image" and the mirror "echo."

This work has put me very much in conversation with people who have the scientific ability and skill to think about these large systems and map them in other ways. What we have in common is that we all use the metaphor of mapping, which creates another relationship with this idea of facsimile, I mean its relationship to cartography. I was thinking about this as Pedro was speaking, and all of this work about discerning these marks and understanding the interplay of sound and the iconography of marking. All of this takes me back to the senses, because sound is associated not just with hearing, but it is also about physical balance, and that sense of the body's balance in the world is about physical position in relation to all experience, the experience of uprightness and the outward orientation of the eyes and limbs.

For me all of these physical and sensual matters relate deeply to the body's experience of physical intimacy, with the voice being the first marker of true difference that anybody experiences, since it physically comes before the experience of visual focus. The power of voice is profound, not just one's own voice but of differentiating voices in the surrounding world, each voice being literally a different vibration recipe and another social anchor; this process of identity differentiation and its relation to sound and experiential movement into the world is very important.

I might also add, anecdotally, but with a sure agreement about the significance of adaptations, that I too am dyslexic, which is why I was not able to go on with a professional conservatory type musical career. For years I could memorize all the music and trick the teachers. But when forced to sight-read, I would invert some rhythms every fourth

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or fifth bar, a real musical liability! This is somewhat like the stories Oliver Sacks relates in *The Anthropologist on Mars*, where we see how enhanced adaptation, in my case to acoustic information and heightened sonic memory, become a way out or way over the disadvantages of slow or poor reading due to dyslexia.

### Joseph Leo Koerner

One thing that was so moving about last night was the ability not only for us to have this incredible painting back in place, but also that the sound could somehow be restored here, too. There were so many instances in my own work where I really regret the loss not of the music of the past, but of the soundscape. For example, Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* has a noisy scene in hell, of blasting horns, harps, and hurdy-gurdies, and it is my view that actually if you could know not only what the noise was that those instruments made, but whether the painting itself was meant as "rough music" or charivari, whether it was a blasting, noisy thing, you'd discover the painting's secret. What tones, in other words, would you play as accompaniment to this painting? It is not a semantic thing, it is not about iconography; it is actually about the sound the painting made: singing or shrieking?

I have a sense of an amazing loss, and in fact there is nothing I suppose left of sound prior to the microphones that accompanied the beginning of film – which suggests presumably that one will want to go back and attend closely to surviving soundtracks to find reconstructed soundscapes from periods back to the 1920s. I have a question about archiving of sound for the future. What would such an archive look like? How would you actually organize it? Could you imagine organizing research institutions? Actually being able to do what never went on in the past, to actually create a sound record starting from our own present day.

### Steven Feld

There are attempts to do exactly that, from conservation and ecological recordings like Bernie Krause's species diversity archive, to what we can find in other well-formalized archives. The Berlin Phonogram Archive is the oldest sound archive in the world; it started in 1900. There is a long and complicated story about the repatriation of the material and the reunification of the archive, which was divided, and that story is told in the book *Music Archiving in the World*, which is a collection of papers from the conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Berlin Phonogram Archive. Let me share a brief story about what happened in the year 2000, when they had that 100th anniversary of this

sound archive. They were trying to think of what would be an appropriate event for a sound archive that was a hundred years old. So they went to wax cylinder number one, dated 1900; it was recorded by an acoustician, who was the founder of the archive, and it was made at a world fair – as many of the earliest recordings of so-called "exotic music" were called at the time. The recording was just labeled "Siamese Orchestra." They sent the recordings to Thailand, to the Music Academy and said: "What is this? Is it still in the repertory? Is it played?" And people there said, yes, of course, the name of that song is such-and-such and it is still in the repertory. So they were asked to come to Berlin to perform it at the 100th anniversary party for the Archive.

This was at a moment when there was a major project to restore the earlier wax cylinders through digital techniques at the Berlin Phonogram Archive. Literally they could simply send a CD to the music conservatory in Thailand, so you see how wonderfully layered and complicated the story of schizophonia becomes. Then what happens is that the musicians from Bangkok show up in Berlin and stage this thing. The original wax cylinder recording was played into a major concert hall over massive speakers, with all of its scratchy sound, and then, as the sound was faded down, the lights were faded up on a contemporary Thai music ensemble, who took off from the core melody, improvising and literally unraveling that piece of music and then returning to the kind of compressed version found on the original wax cylinder recordings. It was, for everybody present, a kind of multiple complex and magical set of connections about the roots and routes of sound recordings and musical repertory over those hundred years.

### Bruno Latour

I can't resist from referring to an interpretation of Veronese's central scene suggested to me by Pedro, which is the following. What the central figures are whispering into Veronese's ear is: "please, transform Saint John's scanty text into a huge, detailed painting, just as musicians amplify scores through playing." Music is therefore necessary to legitimize and visualize the very idea of amplification, of extending the narrative beyond the *auctoritas*.

### Steven Feld

Regarding one of the recording I mentioned before (that of the Arctic), I manipulated that sound in order to make a metaphoric statement about time. So here is the story, this is from Finland, where together with my colleague Helmi Jarviluoma of the University of Joensuu I was making



a commissioned radio program of one hour on the sound of global warming in the Arctic Circle. One of the things that people there were very clear about was how in the months of April and May the water is moving much faster, the permafrost zone is not a permafrost zone anymore, the world has the quality of an acoustic *acelerando* in the pulsation and the intensity of water. So how do we sonify this? How do we understand this in terms of the kind of sonic experience the people are describing?

I wanted to relate that way people in the Arctic Circle are experiencing the acoustics of climate change to the discourse of cultural loss. So, for example, reindeer are not herded any more by bells; reindeer are herded by snowmobiles and helicopters. There are not many reindeer that have bells in the Arctic Circle any more. Many people, many herders, keep what they call home reindeer with bells, as a kind of nostalgic artifact of the world of belled reindeer. It is a very interesting way of inserting nostalgia into the home environment. We did some recording at the home of a herder with a few belled reindeer to experience this sound – this distant sound that has now been made spatially much more intimate.

Then we went to meet Alvi Ruonala. He is the last of seven generations of northern bell makers who have had the commission to make the sleigh bells for the Royal Families of Scandinavia for years. He is the only real master of sleigh bells. But who buys sleigh bells any more? There is not a high demand for this technology. His son is an engineer who does not want to be a bell maker, and his daughter is a marketing major at the University of Lapland, and she is not very interested in becoming a bell maker either.

So there is this anxiety that Alvi Ruonala speaks, that he is the last of this kind of bellmaker. Some people say: "who cares! There is no need for sleigh bells, really." But the real issue to me is not whether making sleigh bells is over and who really cares. The issue to me is how the kind of nostalgia and anxiety articulated around these sleigh bells and reindeer bells runs parallel to the anxiety and nostalgia about the sounds of running water and permafrost.

So I thought, ok, this is my perfect opportunity to combine something about the change that has been experienced in the pulsation of water and sleigh bells. So I took the sounds of rain and reindeer bells and put that in the spatial background. Then I recorded Alvi ringing his sleigh bells. Then I took multiple recordings of water and wind and lake-blown birds in May, all time-capsuled over five minutes. But I didn't just combine and layer all of these things. I spatially manipulated them so that once you hear all the relations of birds, wind, rain, water, reindeer, roads, then something else happens. Starting in the distance on the left, coming into left focus, then moving across the center and to the right, then disappearing from focus there, I have the sound of the sleigh

bells. In other words I acoustically created the path and field of the sleigh in motion. So this is a composition that creates its own set of provocations, questions, possibilities for thinking about these themes of betrayal, of loss. The recording is then an evocation of the anxieties over the acoustic ecology of sleigh bells, reindeer bells and environmental change in this moment in time, this moment in the history of the Arctic Circle. But also, in those same five minutes, it is an acoustic essay on a history of local listening.

So there you have an example of real chronological time, an actual start to finish temporal passage, the acoustic artifact being indexical. And simultaneously you have compressed time, where you have either deletions or contractions or omissions, pasting, overlaps, elisions, actual shortening of temporal passages, the acoustic artifact abbreviated from full indexicality. And then simultaneously you have expanded time, where there are additions, insertions, suspensions, layered overlaps with duplications or repetitions, with variation and modification, the actual expansion of the temporal passage so the acoustic artifact is extended to simulated indexicalities.

When I say it is an artistic intervention I am thinking about a condensed immediate immersion. I don't have two months with you, I can't get you to listen to anything for two months. I might only be able to get you to listen for five minutes. So what can I do with five minutes? In a museum, sometimes you can't get people to listen for even two minutes. I mean, there are different things you can do in installations. But of course I am always working exactly with both narrative and non-narrative sound sequences.

### Joseph Leo Koerner

In paintings, too, a lot depends on the titles given the work. They determine how you interpret it. Because by the end I started to feel sick about the water, because you have the sense that it starts very nicely and then all of a sudden it becomes like a flood, and you feel very depressed. If you didn't have the title of global warming, but if it were the desert, presumably, you wouldn't feel so depressed by the end about all the water. How do you think about placing that kind of narrative on your soundscape?

### Steven Feld

That's a great question, because one of the things that I experienced over and over again is that people sometimes think that these are new-age recordings, that they are meant for relaxation or something similar. So sometimes a person buys it for that kind of purpose or mistakes it for that

## Steven Feld

Well this is a genre and in this genre what people are listening for is some kind of experiential authority and notion of authenticity. That is tied to that idea that someone – whether they are approaching this as a scientist or as an artist – will hear this and immediately want to know about who was present and where, in other words, they will want to link an idea of authenticity to the experiential authority of somebody who was physically present to hear these things in their moment.

## Pedro Memelsdorff

The presumed *origin* of sound poses in your music a problem (in my opinion a false problem), which is the following: whether you played instruments in the traditional way or recorded sounds of nature and then instrumentalized them (as you did), this *is* a composition using instruments, regardless if they are water, the Arctic, or whatever else. I mean, these are sounds that you have intentionally put together and addressed to us. And so none of these illusions are different from any others created by other types of music.

## Steven Feld

You know, this makes me think that it is essential to state that there are different kinds of listeners. One kind of listener will hear something like this and then want to know everything about its content, all the facts on global warming, each and every voice, the full speech and quotations transcribed in the original language, written precisely. This kind of listener would be more comfortable if this were a book because it is only a true kind of knowledge if it is in this form. This kind of listener says that the CD example is fine but should be listened to after reading two hundred pages about the content and context and detail of everything that is heard.

Then there is another kind of listener, the person who listens to this and does not know anything about the Arctic circle and just says: "what the hell is this? Why would somebody do that?" The question has precisely that effect I am interested in, which is to make people wonder about what it means to listen.

kind of recording. And then I get mail saying "I was hoping that I would be relaxed by listening to this, instead it made me so agitated, so angry, and I returned it to the store." The point is: it doesn't matter how one contextualizes the recordings in the notes. People rarely read the notes. It is actually easier to distribute the recordings on the internet because people don't read anything about them anyway. Part of this is about the lack of a critical canon for sound art that is in any way parallel to what we have for literature or music or visual art. So people largely imagine this, imagine the publication of a CD as entertainment and not as something that might have intellectual value or be the centerpiece of any intellectual discourse.

## Bruno Latour

In spite of my ignorance, I want to relate what you just said to Pedro's speech yesterday. The fact that you started by asking again the question of a good and bad way of doing it, and then shifted from an ethnomusicological recording to what you just called "simulated indexicality," which is another way of saying that it is a work of art, this seems to introduce a new category of difficulty. In Pedro's speech yesterday we heard a long discourse about the veracity of the traces going onto the manuscript. And then he referred to the music<sup>9</sup> to which we could probably add a fair dose of our judgment. That is, we could easily say "this music is well done," independently from the fact of whether it was the *accurate* way of doing it. So, there is a duplicity here: is it accurate or is it good? The good and bad have different shibboleths in both cases. That's why this argument is related to our discussion because the very fact that we have this discussion, the fact that we use the word "facsimile" or "look alike" or "replica" and not "work of art" or "painting" is probably connected to this other level.

## Steven Feld

I agree completely and I think that historically there have been considerably more deep conversations around literature and visual art and music. Sound is something else. Certainly because this is such a hybrid mix it again raises stubborn questions about the categories and about the boundaries of discourse.

## Bruno Latour

If this sound had been produced by computers and not by being in the field, would that make a difference? For the listeners of course probably not, but for you?



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, STEVEN FELD (1982/1991), *Sound and Sentiment*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press and STEVEN FELD (1994), 'Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style,' in CHARLES KEIL and STEVEN FELD (eds.), *Music Grooves*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, STEVEN FELD (1996), 'Waterfalls of Song,' in STEVEN FELD and KEITH BASSO (eds.), *Senses of Place*, SAR Press.

<sup>3</sup> See STEVEN FELD (1994), 'From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis,' in CHARLES KEIL and STEVEN FELD, *Music Grooves*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; STEVEN FELD (1996), 'Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis,' *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 28; ARJUN APPADURAI (1986), 'Introduction,' in his *The Social Life of Things*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>4</sup> See WALTER BENJAMIN (1969), 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in HANNAH ARENDT (ed.), *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books.

<sup>5</sup> FELD, STEVEN (1991), *Voices of the Rainforest* (audio cd), Boston: Rykodisc.

<sup>6</sup> See ALAIN CORBIN (1998), *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th Century French Countryside*, translated from the French by Martin Thom, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, these CDs about bells in Europe: STEVEN FELD (2002), *Bells and Winter Festivals of Greek Macedonia*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways; STEVEN FELD (2004-2006), *The Time of Bells*, volumes 1-4, Santa Fe: Voxlo; NICOLA SCALDAFERRI (ed.) (2005), *Santi, Animali, e Suoni*, Udine: Nota. For further discussion see FELD, STEVEN and DON BRENNES (eds.) (2004), 'Doing Anthropology in Sound,' *American Ethnologist*, 31 (4).

<sup>8</sup> The track discussed here is titled 'Sunday Bells of Venice' and appears on the CD: STEVEN FELD (2006), *The Times of Bells*, 4, Santa Fe: VoxLox.

<sup>9</sup> *Faentina. The liturgical music of Codex Faenza 117 (1380-1420)*, Mala Punica, Pedro Menéndezdorff (2005), Ambrosio-ntative AM 105.